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Driving Near Water

At a recent Kennedy Space Center Executive Safety Forum, Brooks Kimmel of Abacus (IMCS) Safety and Health spoke on driving safely near water and what to do in case of a water accident. Below are key points from the presentation.

How to avoid accidents when driving near water:

- Always drive at an appropriate speed for the road and conditions.
- Use caution when passing.
 - Don't get too close to the vehicle you intend to overtake
 - Only pass when authorized to do so, especially on a two-lane road
 - Ensure there is nothing coming toward you
 - Do not pass when approaching intersections or curves
 - Use mirrors often and look back to check your blind spots
 - Quickly and safely pass the vehicle you are overtaking
- Always wear a seatbelt. Some mistakenly believe that wearing a seatbelt would restrict chances of escape; however, wearing a seatbelt will help you survive, minimize initial impact injury, keep you alert in the vehicle, and increase your chances of escape.



Actions to take if your car has crashed into water:

- **Remain calm and assess your situation.** In most water crashes the vehicle will float for a minute or two before the weight of the engine pulls the vehicle under. Your primary goal is to get yourself and your passengers out of the car as quickly as possible. The window is your best escape route. Do not stay in a sinking vehicle.
- **Unbuckle your seatbelt and open the window(s).** Tell all passengers to do the same or, if still possible, open their windows from your console. If your car is in a swift moving current, open only the window(s) on the downstream side of the water flow. This will minimize water rushing in and it will be easier to exit. Exiting through the sun roof (if equipped) may be your best option in strong currents.
- If you can't open a window, **unlock the door(s) and try to break the glass by hitting it with a window shattering tool** (a LifeHammer or ResQMe tool*) or a sharp or pointed object. Aim for a corner of the window (not the center) and strike it with as much force as possible. Windshields are made of laminated glass, making them much harder to shatter than the glass used for side or rear windows.
- **Do not try to open the door initially.** Opening the door most likely will not be possible due to water pressure against the door. It also allows water inside making the vehicle sink faster. Opening the door should only be done if the glass can't be broken and after the car is nearly filled with water, which balances the pressure.
- **GET OUT!** Although it seems obvious, get out of the car and get to the surface as soon as possible! Do not wait and hope or expect others to rescue you.

The following links are for two very good short videos on the subject.

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2X77WddUgg&feature=related>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maywde6ellE&feature=fvw>

* Window shattering tools such as a LifeHammer or ResQMe can be found at most hardware stores.

Did You Know

There were 772 traffic accidents in Florida involving vehicles entering water in 2009.

- 16 with one or more fatalities
- 413 resulted in injuries
- The remaining 343 had vehicle/property damage only

Answer the If's

If the window can't be broken and the vehicle submerges.

A: Wait for the vehicle to fill with water, then take a deep breath and open the door to escape.

If disoriented.

A: Blow a few air bubbles into the water to find the direction to the surface.

If the keys are in the ignition.

Leave them in the ignition and turn on lights. Lights will likely remain on until fully submerged. This may help identify direction to the surface.

If crash is in deep water and time permits.

Remove shoes and heavy clothes that may weigh you down, which makes swimming to the surface more difficult.

If you have questions, comments, or a topic you would like to see addressed:
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